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# AN EVALUATION OF METHODS FOR PROVIDING FREE HIGH-SCHOOL TUITION

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The growing importance of secondary education in this country makes the problem of providing free high-school privileges for those pupils living in school units not maintaining standard high schools an exceedingly important one. An analysis and comparison of existing free tuition laws and their results ought to be suggestive to those states that are facing this problem.

The basis that has been adopted in this paper for classifying these laws is one in which provision for such privileges free of all charges to the pupils is considered to be of first importance, but one in which the equalization between the local unit and the state of the burden for this purpose is at the same time possible and desirable. The implications of this basis will become clear as the analysis proceeds.

The classification is as follows:

- I. Tuition paid wholly or in part by the pupil.
  - A. The pupil must pay all.
  - B. High-school privileges extended by the establishment of union district, township, union township, or county high schools.
  - C. The district (or other local unit) *may* pay the tuition.
  - D. The pupil pays part because the law limits the amount of the tuition fee or the conditions under which it may be paid.
- II. Tuition entirely free.
  - A. The district (or other local unit) pays all.
  - B. Provided by the state through free tuition in state-aided high schools.
  - C. The state and the local unit co-operate in paying all.

This classification does not prevent all overlapping of laws but does so sufficiently to enable us to make a comparison of the educational principles involved.

*Payment entirely by the pupil.*—Fifteen states have no free high-school tuition law. While it is true that in some of these states a large number of eighth-grade graduates do attend high schools in

other districts, it is safe to say that the percentage of pupils doing so is smaller than would be the case were the tuition free. Statistics from Connecticut show what such laws may do. The law in that state was passed in 1897. During the school year 1896-97, 419 non-resident pupils attended high schools; during 1897-98, the first year of the free tuition law, the number was 593, an increase of 41.5 per cent. However, of the 593 only 136 fulfilled the conditions of the law for receiving state aid for tuition. From 1897-98 to 1911-12, the number of towns paying the high-school tuition increased from 32 to 88. In 1911-12, the number attending non-local high schools was 11 per cent of the whole high-school registration. These results were secured in spite of the fact that the law was not mandatory.

*Establishment of union high schools.*—Of the 15 states having no high-school tuition law, most secure some extension of high-school privileges through the establishment of union district, township, union township, or county high schools. It is impossible to state definitely just how important these union schools are as a factor in extending high-school privileges. The following data are, however, suggestive. In Alabama in 1911-12, there were 51 county high schools. In Colorado in 1911-12, 13 of the 64 accredited high schools were county schools. In Maryland in 1911-12, there were 58 high schools in 23 counties. All public high schools are county high schools. Six of these counties have no high school of the first grade; three have no high school of either first or second grade. In Mississippi there are 40 county agricultural high schools. In Montana in 1911-12, 15 of the 34 high schools were county schools with 1,730 of the 4,252 pupils. In Tennessee in 1911-12, there were 111 county high schools in 46 of the 96 counties. There were 7,546 pupils enrolled. In 1914, New Mexico had county high schools in 14 of the 26 counties.

Union high schools may do much in certain states, but they do not by any means solve the problem of free high-school privileges. There is still needed some law providing free tuition for those pupils who cannot attend a union high school.

*Permissive tuition laws.*—A few states provide that free tuition may be granted. This is the case in Connecticut where the state

will, when certain conditions are fulfilled, reimburse the town to the extent of two-thirds of the tuition paid but not more than \$30 per year for any one pupil. In 1911-12, there were only 7 towns that did not maintain high schools or pay the tuition in other high schools. The Barnes law of Kansas, passed in 1909, provides that counties in which there are no county high schools may vote a county tax for the support of all high schools in the state that maintain a standard course of study and admit pupils free. In 1911, 37 counties had such a tax. Besides the Barnes law there are several statutes dealing with the tuition problem. There is provision whereby free high-school privileges may be secured through the establishment of township and county high schools. In 1911, 24 of the 105 counties besides those having the Barnes law had county high schools. Provision is also made whereby any school district not in a county high-school district may levy a tax for free tuition. The North Carolina high-school law of 1907 provided that the county board of education might make an agreement with the trustees of a public high school in the county for free instruction. If there is an average attendance at this high school of at least 10 pupils from outside the local district, the high school is entitled to aid on the same basis as the regular state-aided high schools. In 1909, Oregon passed a law permitting counties to levy a tax for the maintenance of high schools providing free tuition for all pupils in the county. In 1911-12, 8 counties had levied such a tax. There were also 6 county high schools. In New York, city and union district high schools receive from the state \$20 for each non-resident pupil given free instruction. For cities whose customary charge is larger than this sum a special provision grants that the city "may charge the difference between the sum regularly apportioned by the state and the city's or district's customary charge for the tuition of non-resident pupils, provided the balance of such customary charge shall have been legally assumed and provided for by the school district in which such pupils are resident. Such excess charge should be assumed by a resolution duly adopted at a district meeting in such school district." In West Virginia there is no specific high-school tuition law, but State Superintendent Shawkey says that "Section 66 is so worded as to make this permissive, and we have

advised boards to pay the tuition of high-school pupils whenever their funds are sufficient. Many boards have been quick to take advantage of this section and are paying the tuition of all pupils who desire to attend high schools in other districts."

Permissive tuition laws are, of course, suggestive of what ought to be done, but whether such laws are effective will depend upon the educational sentiment of the people. In Connecticut, at least, the permissive law seems now to have almost as much effect as if it were compulsory, but it must be admitted that permissive laws are too likely to have little practical influence. On the other hand, it must be remembered that a compulsory law is worth little unless a large proportion of the people believe in it. The general tendency in the states now is to make tuition laws compulsory.

*Partially free tuition.*—There are four forms of this method.

1. Provision for free tuition only in certain districts. Such is the case in Idaho. According to the commissioner of education, the law refers only to regular districts and not to independent, consolidated, and rural high-school districts. It is likely that these other districts usually have high schools, but there are many that do not have standard complete high schools. The tuition law provides that properly prepared high-school pupils are eligible to attend any high school within the county without paying tuition, and that compensation will be made to the high school attended by the action of the county superintendent in transferring to the high school from the home district of the pupil "a sum of money bearing the same proportion to the amount of money received by the district during the year as said pupil or pupils bear to the total school census of the district in which such pupil or pupils belong." The money referred to is that received from outside sources—state and county apportionment. One element of this law is the county limitation; the law provides for payment only in the county where the pupil lives. If there is no complete high school, the privileges are not as adequate as they should be. A second matter of interest is the provision for compensating the high school attended. There are no available data in regard to high-school costs, but according to the *Eleventh Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public*

*Instruction* the per-pupil cost of all public schools was, in 1912, \$37.99. In the same year the state and county apportionment amounted to about \$22 for each pupil in average daily attendance. If the last-named sum is even approximately representative of the compensation per pupil to be made for free high-school privileges, the high schools attended may not be fully compensated. In this connection it should be remembered that a high school may accommodate a small number of non-resident pupils at little or no additional expense. It seems that there is much dissatisfaction with the law in Idaho both because some parents must pay tuition and because what the high-school districts receive does not compensate them for the instruction given. On the other hand there are many districts that make no attempt to collect tuition even when the law permits it.

2. A second form of partially free tuition is that providing only for the payment up to a certain rate or amount by some school unit. In some communities this rate or amount permits the payment of all the tuition; in many communities it does not. In South Dakota, the district is required to pay the tuition up to \$2 per month, while any amount in excess of this must be paid by the pupil. The tuition charge may not exceed the per-capita cost of maintaining the school. Michigan limits the amount the district must pay to \$20 per pupil unless the district votes to increase this. Maine provides that the town shall pay the tuition up to \$30 per pupil and that two-thirds of this, not exceeding \$500, shall be refunded by the state. In Delaware, the State Board of Education is required to select certain graded schools which may be attended by pupils of school age living in districts not maintaining graded schools. For this attendance the state is to pay 20 cents per pupil per day. The city of Wilmington is not held to this requirement, and if it does admit non-residents, it may charge what it thinks proper. If the city does admit outside pupils, it may receive the regular sum from the state and this sum is to be deducted from the charge made the pupil. Vermont requires a town to maintain a first-class high school or to furnish tuition up to \$24 per year. Upon vote of the town a higher rate may be paid. The

state then refunds a certain percentage of the tuition, depending upon the amount expended for school purposes. The New Hampshire law requires towns not maintaining high schools to provide tuition up to \$40 per pupil per year. Inasmuch as some schools charge more than this, tuition is not always free. The state refunds a certain percentage of the tuition on the basis of the tax rate levied. The details will be found in another part of this paper. The Vermont and New Hampshire laws are illustrations of the serious efforts now being made by several states to base the distribution of their school funds upon the needs of the various communities. Later reference will be made to this aspect of the free tuition problem.

3. A third form of law providing partially free tuition is that requiring the payment of the tuition except when the district is unable to maintain its school properly. In Nebraska, the district pays 75 cents per week to the high school attended unless the district is unable to maintain a school for nine months after levying the maximum tax rate of 35 mills. Arkansas provides that pupils in counties having no high schools may attend one in another county at the rate of \$1.50 per month. The home district pays this unless it is unable to maintain a common school for six months. In Ohio, districts maintaining a second- or a third-grade high school are not required to pay the tuition if the district is levying the maximum rate and all funds are needed for the support of its schools. Other districts or local units must pay the tuition. The rate may not exceed the per-capita cost of such schooling.

4. A fourth form is found in South Carolina where the law provides that a pupil may attend any state-aided high school in the county. In Arkansas, the same arrangement is made. In 1911-12, there were three counties in this state without such schools.

In general, laws such as these are better than those that have been considered thus far, in that the high-school privileges are likely to be more certain than under permissive tuition laws, and more extensive in actual influence than where they are dependent upon the establishment of union high schools. The chief weakness of this type of law is that it provides only partially free tuition. In some of the states the burden upon the pupil is not likely to be

very heavy. This seems to be the case particularly in Delaware, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The co-operation of the state and the local unit, evidenced by the state-aid provisions cited in some of the cases above, increases the effectiveness of these tuition laws.

*Tuition paid entirely by the local unit* is the first of three methods by which tuition is made entirely free. In Arizona, the unit for this purpose is the district; in Indiana, the school corporation, usually the township; in Iowa, the school corporation, whether district, independent district, consolidated district, or township; in Kentucky, the county. Illinois, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin also have this type of law.

By this method one goal has been reached—tuition has been provided without cost to the pupil. But, while we are seeking this goal, other considerations must be kept in mind. It will be quite generally conceded that free tuition ought not be secured at the expense of the elementary school. Will the requirement that the district pay all of the tuition have such an effect? Obviously, this will depend upon the conditions under which the law is carried out. If the unit paying the tuition is small or comparatively poor or has unusual educational demands upon it, the unit must sacrifice somewhat the efficiency of the elementary school in order to meet the requirements of the law or must bear a heavier school burden. Which alternative is accepted will depend upon the educational sentiment of the community. As the unit increases in size or wealth or its educational needs decrease, the danger of affecting the work of the elementary school decreases. There can, however, be no doubt that in some states there are districts that cannot support a standard elementary school, much less do this and pay the tuition of its eighth-grade graduates. Thus, State Superintendent Bishop of Nebraska reported in 1910 that there were 387 districts in 35 counties that were unable to maintain a school for five months when levying the maximum tax. It will be remembered that the law in that state protects such districts by relieving them of the requirement for paying high-school tuition.

A defect in some of the laws of this type is the setting of a maximum tuition rate. In Arizona it is \$3 per month; in Indiana, \$4



per month; In Iowa, \$3.50 per month, except in one county having a county high school where the rate is \$2.00 per month; in Virginia, \$2.50 per month; in Wisconsin, \$1 per week. What may happen is shown by a brief quotation from the 1910 report of the high-school inspector of Wisconsin: "The total cost of instruction alone was \$958,543.20, or an average per pupil of \$34.59; the total amount received and due for tuition was reported as \$132,006.73, or less than 14 per cent of the whole. That is, these outside pupils paid only about one-half of their proper share of the cost of instruction. Even if the special aid of \$125,000 received by these schools be added to the tuition, the entire amount will be less than their proportionate amount. The above figures take into account only the bare cost of instruction, the salaries of the teachers; the large expenditures for buildings, equipment, and general incidentals are borne entirely by the districts, and the non-residents receive the benefit without contributing anything whatever to the cost." As a result, Wisconsin has since that time raised the maximum rate from 50 cents per week to \$1 per week. In 1909, Indiana raised the rate from \$2 per month to \$4 per month.

Such a defect in the law may be remedied either by setting no maximum rate or by making the rate so high that it will in all cases cover the actual cost to the high school attended. In view of the fact that high-school costs are increasing at a rather rapid rate and that legislation generally lags behind actual needs, the setting of a definite maximum seems undesirable. To the writer it would seem better to follow the plan employed by Illinois and other states of setting the maximum at the per-capita cost of maintaining the high school, with added provision for appeal to the proper school official when such cost seems excessive or when the admission of non-residents increases the cost to the high school unduly.

But such a change cannot remedy the inherent defect in this method—requiring the district to pay high-school tuition when it is unable to maintain more than a standard elementary school. Solution of this problem may come through some form of assistance from the state.

*Free tuition in state-aided high schools* is provided in Minnesota, North Dakota, Washington, Arkansas, and South Carolina.

Arkansas and South Carolina limit the pupils who may attend to those of the county in which the high school is located. The other states make no such limitation; the pupils may come from any part of the state.

In this method we have an extreme reaction to the method of requiring the district to pay all the tuition since here the district is not required to pay any of it. It is undoubtedly true that many districts are able to pay all or a part of this tuition, and it seems only fair that such districts should be required to do so. Table I presents data showing that some districts are able to pay this. The first ten in the list of state graded schools of Minnesota are given. The data are taken from the state report for 1907-8, the latest report in which the data are accessible.

TABLE I

School	Tax Rate	Variation from Average Rate	Percentage of Average Rate
Adams.....	10.40	- 6.17	62.7
Albany.....	8.90	- 7.67	53.7
Ashby.....	23.08	+ 6.51	139.3
Audubon.....	10.00	- 6.57	60.3
Aurora.....	4.50	- 12.07	27.1
Avoca.....	22.70	+ 6.13	136.9
Badger.....	43.60	+ 27.03	263.1
Balaton.....	20.00	+ 3.43	120.7
Battle Lake.....	16.00	- .57	96.5
Beardsley.....	15.00	- 1.57	90.5
Average rate for state graded schools..	16.57	.....	.....

In order to reach the minimum standard required by the state, six of the ten schools need not levy a tax equal to the average for state graded schools. Yet the pupils from these schools are allowed free tuition in state-aided high schools as well as are the pupils from those schools that levy more than the average tax rate.

Another result that may follow from the use of this method is the destruction of the good effects of the special state aid to high schools. It is presumed that when special aid is granted to a school, that school is worthy in itself of receiving this aid. If the school is compelled to care for any number of non-residents that may apply, it is conceivable that the special aid is merely aid for free tuition. While Wisconsin is not employing the method under discussion at this point, that state may be used to illustrate the

probable effect of a law requiring each state-aided high school to receive non-residents without charge. Wisconsin is cited because it is the only state for which data are available. The injustice shown here will be even less than might be expected from states employing this method, since Wisconsin schools may charge a tuition fee while the others may not. The state high-school inspector estimated in 1908 that the state aid of \$500 per school, which was from \$100 to \$150 more than was actually given, would, when added to the regular tuition fee, provide free tuition for about 33 pupils. In 1908-9, 78 of the 268 four-year high schools had 33 or more non-resident pupils, so that in 78 high schools state aid was entirely, and in other high schools partly, diverted from its purpose. Since the tuition rate has been raised in that state, conditions now will be much better.

Both of the difficulties incident to providing free tuition in state-aided high schools may be overcome by a proper co-operation between the state and the local unit.

*Co-operation of state and local unit.*—One form of this co-operation is found in California and Pennsylvania where the amount given by the state to any high school must be deducted from the cost of maintaining the high school before the tuition rate may be estimated. This method has some advantage over both the other methods of furnishing entirely free tuition in that the district is given the advantage of sharing in such funds as the state appropriates to high schools, and the high school attended is not compelled to receive non-residents at a financial loss. However, no distinction is made in the different abilities of local units to pay the tuition.

A second form of this co-operation is that in which the state allows a certain amount or percentage per pupil and the district pays the remainder. Such laws are found in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. In this connection should be mentioned Connecticut and New York which have permissive laws, and Maine, Delaware, New Hampshire, and Vermont which provide partially free tuition.

In some of these states no distinction is made in the ability of different districts to pay the tuition. Maine provides that two-

thirds of the tuition, not exceeding \$500 to any town, shall be paid by the state. The result may be seen from the data for 1909-10 given in Table II. The first ten towns in the list of those receiving

TABLE II

Town	Paid for High-School Tuition	Rate Necessary to Raise This	Common School Tax	Entire School Tax
Alna.....	\$ 87.20	.55 mills	3.5 mills	4.05 mills
Argyle.....	27.00	.43	8.9	9.33
Atkinson.....	103.50	.62	6.0	6.62
Avon.....	16.75	.09	2.3	2.39
Benton.....	174.86	.19	2.6	2.79
Bethel.....	1,107.50	1.10	2.0	3.10
Blanchard.....	16.00	.16	5.2	5.36
Boothbay.....	18.16	.03	3.5	3.53
Bowdoin.....	115.78	.34	2.9	3.24
Bradley.....	70.00	.36	3.3	3.36
Average rate for state....				2.40

state aid for tuition are given. Avon and Benton have practically the average rate for the state; Argyle, Atkinson, and Blanchard, for example, have a much higher rate.

New Jersey has a similar type of law. There the state pays \$25 for each high-school pupil whose tuition has been paid by the district.

Other states make provision for districts of different ability to pay different amounts. There is not space here to compare in detail the various methods employed for this purpose. All that may be attempted is to point out some of the more conscious attempts that are made to assist each community in paying its high-school tuition to the extent and only to the extent that its educational needs justify.

Rhode Island pays \$25 for each of the first 25 pupils in average daily attendance and \$15 for each of the second 25 pupils. This law is evidently based upon the theory that those districts sending more than 25 pupils to other high schools will be larger, and so presumably will be more able to pay the tuition than will those districts sending 25 pupils or less.

The Massachusetts law excludes from tuition aid all towns of 500 or more families and all having a valuation per pupil above the valuation per pupil of the entire state. All towns not so

excluded receive assistance as follows: if the valuation of the town is \$1,000,000 or over, one-half the tuition is paid; if the valuation is under \$1,000,000, all of the tuition is paid. This law makes the size of the town, the valuation of the town, and the average valuation per pupil the indices of the school needs.

The most elaborate law is found in New Hampshire. Here the tax rate levied is considered the index of need. If the town has a tax rate for school purposes below \$3.50 per \$1,000, or if the average rate for all purposes for five years preceding is less than \$16.50, none of the tuition is paid. All other towns are aided according to the rate levied. Towns having a rate between \$16.50 and \$17.49 receive one-tenth of the tuition, and for each increase in rate of one dollar above that rate the state increases the percentage of the tuition paid by one-tenth. Thus, towns levying a rate of \$25.49 or more would receive the entire cost of tuition from the state.

Do the tuition laws of Rhode Island and New Hampshire and the other states that refund different amounts to different communities provide for assistance according to need or are there other factors that, being more fundamental and constant than those shown here, will always give a better index of school needs? The answer can be given only after the collection of considerable data and after a careful evaluation of the conditions which each state has to meet. No answer is attempted here, but the proposition is advanced that if such factors exist they should be discovered and employed not only in free high-school tuition laws but in all laws covering public-school finance.

This evaluation of the methods now employed in providing free high-school tuition indicates that some form of co-operation between the state and the local unit is the preferable one. (1) It provides tuition without cost to the pupil. (2) It does not divert special state aid for high schools from its real purpose. (3) It tends to protect the elementary school by reducing the burden placed upon the home district of the pupil. (4) If the details are properly arranged, it will provide full compensation to the high school attended. (5) It offers an opportunity to require of the home district that payment which it is able to make and throws the rest of the burden upon the state.